

Counselor Licensure: To Be or Not to Be

The question of licensing has burst upon the counseling scene fairly recently, and it is irrevocably related to two other issues that have been with us for a long time—namely, (a) the determination of the professional functions of counselors, and (b) the determination of the professional education of counselors to equip them to effectively perform these functions. I see

these issues as still unsolved, and I hope that APGA and some of the divisions do not plunge into licensing before they have determined who counselors are, what they are supposed to do, and what they need to have in the way of skills and knowledge in order to do it.

In this paper I would like to examine the problem of licensing, and its rela-

tionship to these basic issues, with special reference to the model for state legislation concerning the practice of licensing as presented by the APGA Commission on Counselor Licensure in January 1976.

Why Licensing?

Most counselors generally accept the concept of licensing when its basic



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purpose is described as the maintenance and control of the professional competence and personal ethics and behavior of members of the profession. The level of disagreement goes up sharply, however, when we look more closely at such questions as who is doing the controlling, what are they trying to control, what are considered to be competencies, and how do the controllers measure these competencies? Some of my more skeptical psychologist friends believe that one of the major effects of licensing in psychology has been to legitimize incompetency!

It is likely that one of the reasons why psychologists seek licensing is very human and personal, and I assume that this same reason will apply to counselors. Being a "licensed" counselor may give the same ego satisfaction as being named a "fellow" psychologist instead of an "associate" psychologist, or a "diplomat" instead of a "fellow." Whether an unlicensed associate psychologist is less competent than a licensed diplomate psychologist is, however, open to question, although the answer obviously should be a very definite "Yes."

There are, of course, some very practical reasons, such as employment, why counselors should be interested in the question of licensing. A licensed psychologist is simply one up on a non-licensed psychologist (if such a psychologist can exist) in the mind of any employer, and counselors will likely soon be in the same situation. We can assume, too, that accreditation of school guidance centers, like mental health clinics, will be very definitely related to the number of licensed staff. The advent of third party payments, and the certainty of the appearance of a national health insurance plan has had an even more powerful impact on the licensing movement, since only the licensed will be eligible for third party payments. As a licensed psychologist in Massachusetts, for example, I am automatically eligible to become a Blue Shield health service provider, and a significant part of my fee for private clients is covered by Blue Shield and other insurance plans. As more and more individuals get coverage for mental health and psychological problems, it is obvious that they will go to individuals and clinics and centers where their insurance can be used. The evaluation of the quality of a guidance department in a school will obviously be affected by the proportion of licensed staff, and the ultimate step, of course, will be that a school system could hire only licensed counselors if

it wished to be the recipient of any state or federal funding.

I would guess that licensing for counselors is still much more of an issue for the organizational hierarchy of APGA than it is for most programs of counselor education, and that it is hardly an issue at all for the counselors who labor in the school vineyards. But it behooves such counselors to become very interested. Their jobs, may depend on it!

The Issues

1. If licensing is to mean anything, it must be directly related to the professional functions of the person to be licensed, and these, in turn, must be directly reflected in the programs that train and educate the person to be licensed. This assumes, of course, that the professional functions of the licensee have been clearly delineated, and that the professional experiences of the licensee are an extension of those skills and knowledge learned in the educational and training programs. This is still an unsolved issue in the licensing of psychologists, which is now in effect in most states, and it poses the possibility of being an almost insurmountable problem in the licensing of counselors.

The decade of the '60s was a period of intense organizational activity on the part of APGA and some of its divisions in an attempt to somehow solve the problem of defining the professional functions of the school counselor. The sentiments of these recommendations may be noted by the fact that in the 1964 position paper of ASCA the first four of the ten functions described started with the words "Assist each pupil to . . ."; the first of the four functions described in an APGA paper of 1964 started with the words, "The major responsibility of the counselor is to assist an individual through the counseling relationship . . ."; and in a joint ACES-ASCA paper of 1966 the functions of the elementary school counselor were described primarily as counseling and consulting with pupils, parents, teachers, and members of the community.

It is my somewhat pessimistic impression that these most laudable organizational attempts to professionalize counseling in the past decade have had only a minimal impact on what counselors actually do in schools, and on what employers expect them to do. Nor do I see much impact of all this effort on the development and modification of counselor education programs.

I wonder how many counselor education staff, for example, have copies of the 1973 APGA *Standards for the Preparation of Counselors and Other Personnel Specialists* beside them as they examine their programs?

Probably the most promising development in the past few years is the increasing number of competency based counselor education programs (Dash 1975). Licensing, it is hoped, will center around these professional competencies that, in turn, should distinguish the person known as "counselor" from other professional personnel, including those known as "psychologist" and "social worker."

We are still, however, bedeviled by a fragmentation of counselor functions, and this confusion is as evident in the literature today as it was a decade ago. By the middle of the last decade, Sexton (1965) was saying "the less we emphasize the psychological, the psychiatric, and anything therapeutic the better feeling the students will have toward counseling." Two years later Krueger (1967) warned school counselors about the grave effects of taking seriously such terms as "relationship" and "acceptance." In the same year Venn (1967) stated that the counselor "must be a teacher on assignment, like a school administrator, not a specialist from another profession working in a school." By 1973 we had progressed to where Haas (1973) told us that "Teachers will counsel, clerks will do the paper work, and counselors will train," and in the same year Carroll (1973) felt that the counselor was "the vital strategist, consultant and trainer." The next year Pine (1974) stated that "It is time to give school counseling away," and two years later Hayes (1975) said that he was proud to be a counselor, and described himself as "an articulation, assessment, attendance, guidance, career, employment, financial, follow-up, foreign student, health, placement, referral and research counselor." Looking at even this brief sampling, one might well be bewildered in trying to determine just what is meant by "counselor" competencies!

If the pressure for licensing does nothing else, it might at least sharpen the need for a clear delineation of just what it is in the way of professional competencies that makes the counselor any different than various other school personnel such as teachers, psychologists, social workers, nurses, and administrators. It is of some interest to note, however, that in a recent article on the licensing of counselors, Cotting-

ham (1975) makes no reference to the problem of delineation of counselor functions. Nor does the model for licensing presented in January 1976 by the APGA Commission on Counselor Licensure do much to clarify this issue. The variety of terms used to describe "licensed professional counselor" and "counseling procedures" are varied enough to describe many psychologists and social workers and their professional functions.

2. If competencies can be determined, then licensing should be directly related to an evaluation of the degree of achievement of these competencies, and counselors can learn lessons on what not to do from the experience of psychologists. There are 36 divisions in the American Psychological Association, and it would seem logical to assume that the competencies required of a psychologist whose major affiliation was with *Division 35, Psychology of Women*, would not be the same as those required of a psychologist whose major affiliation was with *Division 3, Experimental Psychology*. Most psychologists who belong to *Division 29, Psychotherapy*, are psychotherapists, and the competencies required to make them effective psychotherapists are quite different from the competencies required of those psychologists who belong to *Division 2, Teaching Psychology*. But in New Hampshire and Massachusetts, and, I believe, in most of the states, there is no differentiation in the licensing examination.

The APGA Commission appears to put the cart before the horse on this issue. It states that the basic legislation should define the generic term while enabling provisions may be made to allow for subspecialties through Board rules. But if the generic term is so omnibus that it ceases to have any specific meaning, then what is it that one is licensing?

It is obvious, too, that a multiple choice examination can hardly measure the competencies of a practitioner, and the practitioner of some years is particularly victimized by such an examination. I, for example, see my primary function as a counselor and psychotherapist working with individuals, couples, families, and groups. I hold to an existential-humanistic-phenomenological point of view, and in my university work I try to help graduate students become more effective counselors and psychotherapists. We believe that a grounding in theoretical knowledge and an understanding of past therapies are essential, but particular stress is placed

on the recent therapies of the past decade and a half. This is where I feel my psychological competencies lie, and this is where I feel those competencies should be evaluated. The licensing examinations in New Hampshire and Massachusetts, however, while they might license me to practice in those states, do absolutely nothing to evaluate my competence in those areas where I feel my professional energy as a psychologist is expended.

Miller and Engin (1976) paint an exciting picture of just how counselor competency can be evaluated in a more valid manner, but they all too realistically, I am afraid, put the operational date as January 3, 1986! Their 1-day evaluation experience does not ignore what the counselor knows, but it places great stress on what the counselor does. I would look forward to having my professional competencies evaluated via the route described by Miller and Engin!

3. Any licensing activity must involve the profession, the training and educational program, and the potential employer. There is little point in licensing an elementary school counselor if the employer has no interest in the competencies for which the counselor is licensed, nor is there any point in trying to develop licensing experiences with no relationship to the professional education of the person to be examined. It is hoped that each group can help to educate the others, but there must be some kind of on-going relationship between the institutions that educate counselors, the professional organizations that represent counselors, and the individuals and institutions that hire counselors. Only minimal attention is paid to the problems of these interfaces in the licensing model presented by the APGA Commission.

4. The problem of distinguishing between school counselors and school psychologists and school social workers in a meaningful way may prove to be a difficult one. Many school counselors would see themselves as being involved in a therapeutic and helping relationship with individuals, couples, families, and groups; many would see themselves as being experts in the understanding and modification of human behavior; many would see an important function as being that of assessment and evaluation of human behavior and human problems; many would see themselves as having a direct involvement in environmental factors such as the school, the family, the church, and other organizations that impinge upon and affect the behavior of children. But these are

tasks that obviously are not limited to counselors, and definitions of school counselors, school social workers, and school psychologists often sound as if they were describing the same person. Here, for example, are three definitions of three professional workers in the schools:

- Will perform a counseling function with pupils as well as parents and teachers . . . will perform a consultative function with parents and with other school and community personnel . . . will perform a coordinating function in integrating the resources of the school and the community. (ACES-ASCA 1966)

- Understanding and providing help, within the program of the school, for children who are having difficulties in using the resources of the school effectively . . . an approach . . . based on his understanding of human behavior, his skill in relationship and interviewing, and his ability to use school and community resources. (Nebo 1960)

- Psychological counseling and guidance with such specific activities as individual child guidance, individual parent counseling, student counseling groups, and parent discussion groups; consultation, with such activities as consulting with individual teachers, teacher discussion groups, research and educational development, and referral and community services; individual and psychological evaluation, including such activities as case study, examination, diagnoses, recommending, reporting, and follow-up procedures. (Valett 1963)

Could anyone say that there is a precise and clear cut delineation between (a) a school counselor, (b) a school social worker, and (c) a school psychologist? Indeed, it would seem that any person who was licensed to function as any one of these individuals could perform quite adequately the functions of the other two!

At a meeting of the APGA Commission on Licensure, Arthur Centor, professional affairs officer for APA is quoted as saying (Guidepost, 1976) that APA is not opposed to another group seeking licensure "so long as the group does not intrude in our area or confuse the public into thinking that its profession is in any way related to psychology." If counseling is *not* related in any way to psychology, it is difficult to see what counselors might be licensed to do, other than performing the bits-and-pieces tasks that unfortunately take up a good deal of their time today.

The APGA Commission makes it clear that the "counseling functions"

described by them *do* overlap with the functions of other professional workers. The report states that "There is no intention by the Commission to suggest restricting the use of counseling procedures to persons licensed as counselors." Who does what obviously remains an unsolved issue.

5. Licensure too frequently licenses one to use a certain title, such as "psychologist," but it does not license one to perform certain services. If the primary professional reason for licensing is to control and measure the professional competency of the person to be licensed, this is certainly a meaningless procedure, other than possibly having the incompetent practitioner change his or her title. Yet many individuals who formerly called themselves "psychologists" now call themselves counselors or psychotherapists, and continue to do exactly what they have been doing. Professions are understandably concerned with the services they perform, and if counselors cannot nail down certain professional competencies that are unique to them, one might indeed wonder if counseling is a "profession." The APGA Commission makes it clear that the legislation that is being proposed includes regulating the practice of counseling as well as the use of the title "Licensed Professional Counselor," but as has been indicated, there is no clear delineation of any unique counselor functions.

The Future

Licensing is in the works, there is no doubt about that. In a few years, licensing of psychologists has spread to practically every state in the country. The 93rd Congress recognized psychologists on complete parity with physicians in a number of legislative acts and through legislation such as CHAMPUS, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the HMO Development Act of 1973, and the Federal Employee Health Benefit Act. Blue Shield and other insurers of mental health services include only licensed psychologists in their roster of mental health providers. The APA includes only licensed psychologists in its National Register of Health Service Providers in Psychology. Virginia has become the first state in the country to require licensing as a "personnel and guidance counselor," and in 1975 Texas passed legislation providing for the licensing of "social psychotherapists." In January 1976, APGA made available its model licensing bill and licensure overview, and continued work is being done on this

issue. The APGA Commission on Licensure has also undertaken, in the year 1976-77 a study on National Recognition and Identification of Professional Counselors.

So licensing is on the way, but we should not ignore the pitfalls in what might become a headlong rush for licensing, and while we can learn from the experiences of APA, we should not necessarily see virtue in blindly trying to copy them. Here are some thoughts about what might be done about some of the licensing issues that appear to lie ahead of us.

1. Control is an old issue, but it is a valid one. *Who* determines *how* what competencies are to be achieved is a key ethical question in any licensing proposal, and I do not see evidence to indicate that either state psychological associations or the APGA Commission has answered this to any satisfactory degree. Licensing, by its very nature, must be a combination of the political and the professional, but the professional rationale for licensing must be continually stressed. The Commission's model simply gives the governor the authority to appoint the 7 members of the Licensing Board. This authority, however, should be limited, in that the individuals appointed should be selected from a list of names carefully prepared by the APGA Commission, or some other appropriate professional body. Otherwise, the appointments almost inevitably will become political rather than professional.

2. "In groups" tend to perpetuate their own particular personal and professional bias, and the tenure of members of a Licensing Board should be long enough to insure a competent performance, but brief enough so that there will not be a misuse of power. I would feel that one full term of three years would be a better balance than the Commission's recommendation of not more than two full terms of three years each.

Licensing boards may tend to stultify rather than encourage growth and development and the looking in different directions, and this fact stresses the necessity of careful selection of the members of a Licensing Board and the limitation of their tenure. The very fact that certain licensing examinations in psychology have not changed significantly in 15 years would surely indicate that the profession is either in an advanced moribund state, or the licensing examination is not measuring what are now considered to be competencies required of psychologists. Also, the use of

multiple choice examinations to measure competencies could hardly be considered to be one of the newer means of professional evaluation. Nor, of course, can performance be considered to be an absolutely valid measure of counselor competency. As Gidden and Price (1975) say, "Performance-based assessment can not only be misapplied, it can also be used in the service of meaningless goals and standards, sometimes resulting in the continued oppression of a particular group of students."

Historically, the licensing boards of both the American Psychological Association and the American Medical Association have hardly been the leaders in the advancement of the profession. Instead, they have tended to measure what was, rather than what is, let alone what might be. The APGA Commission does not really look at this question of the personal and professional competence of the members of the Licensing Board. To say that five members of the Board must be licensed counselors and two must be chosen from the public is surely not enough. If there are to be seven members of the Licensing Board, these men and women must be the best, both professionally and personally, that we have in the profession.

3. The APGA Commission correctly stresses the need for an on-going evaluation of professional competence, but the recommendation of an annual nationally standardized examination surely goes against the evidence of history. I have vivid memories of the national examination that supposedly measured the skills and knowledge to be acquired in National Defense Education Guidance Institutes. It would seem more logical to put the emphasis on the accreditation of counselor education departments, and let them determine the means by which the acquisition of skills and knowledge are to be evaluated.

Temporary licensing could be tied directly to the granting of the degree signifying professional competence. After a probationary period of say, three years, an individual could be granted a renewable 3-year license after the successful completion of a licensing experience. The primary function of state licensing should be the continual reevaluation of the competencies of counselors, with various methods of re-learning if an individual does not meet minimal competency requirements. The hard fact that would have to be faced in this procedure is that some counselors might not make it, and while every human consideration should be given to them, they should not be

allowed to function as counselors when they have been judged to be inadequate as counselors.

Thus I see no need for an annual renewal of the counseling license, and the Commission recommendation that every two years the counselor must present evidence of professional growth should be expanded. There needs to be a longer evaluation *experience* that would be taken every 3, 4 or 5 years. Certainly the idea that a license to practice is a guarantee of competency until the end of one's professional life is as irrational as the idea that "tenure" in a university is a guarantee of continued scholarly competence.

4. The APGA Commission describes numerous job titles that would fit under the term "Licensed Professional Counselor," and it describes numerous functions that would be considered to be the "practice of counseling." But there can be no valid licensing of the "counselor" than there has been in the past of the "psychologist" because of the functionally different kinds of counselors and psychologists. The only recognition of this issue by the Commission is the statement that "enabling provisions may be made to allow for subspecialties through Board rules." The skills and knowledge required of a counselor in a suburban elementary school are quite different than those required of a counselor in an inner city high school. Any licensing procedure that does not recognize this fact is simply invalid.

This also means, of course, that while all counselor education students might experience a common core of knowledge and skills, there would be different kinds of educational experiences for different kinds of counselors. The determination of these differences is a difficult problem that has been largely ignored by the Commission.

If all that APGA does is to primarily imitate what is already in existence in the field of psychology, then I am not so sure that we will be doing anything more than moving from the frying pan into the fire. It could be, however, that APGA will set a new standard for the determination, the development, and the execution of a licensing experience that is truly related to the professional competence of the individual counselor. It could be.

P&G

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Ghetto Blues

I sit here in my soul-hole
forgotten
a can of black caviar
on my ghetto grocer's shelf
prices sky high
selling you that same old
rotten
on the shelf for years
stuff.
Ghettos—
Harlem
Watts
Detroit
Boston . . .

What about here?
Ain't it slummy enough
for the Man
to put the label on?
Naw.
He lives here too.
Or does he?
Forgotten
in my tattered soul-hole
white caviar in surrealism
on my ghetto grocer's shelf
broken tones of shattered blues
Scream for Human Renewal

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